

Study finds better wording may improve apartment community perception

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The right choice of words may improve the public perception of apartment communities and the people living in them, says a new report from Ball State University.

The study found that the vocabulary used by the media doesn't always reflect the updated image of the apartment industry, said Carla Earhart, the study's author who teaches residential property management in the family and consumer sciences department at Ball State.

She points out that the apartment industry continues to grow in the number of communities being built, individuals selecting renting over homeownership and employment opportunities for property management professionals.

"However, the development of some apartment communities continues to be met with resistance from the public," she said. "Through my work with the apartment industry nationwide, I've seen the many advantages of living and working in today's multifamily housing environment. But the terminology being used needs to catch up to truly reflect these advantages."

Terms to describe apartments

Earhart's investigation replicates an earlier pilot study in which online news articles were reviewed for terminology describing the apartment

industry.

The study found:

- The less desirable term "unit" is used much more than the preferred "apartment home."
- The less desirable "complex" is used more than the preferred "apartment community."
- The more desirable "resident" is used more often than the less desirable "tenant" or "renter."
- Both "community manager" (preferred) and "landlord" (not preferred) were used, although infrequently, but "landlord" appeared more often.

Need for media training

Earhart pointed out that a major concern from this study is that many of the online news articles that contain the less desirable language, including "unit," "complex," "tenant," and "landlord," were written by real estate media, some in publications specific to the multifamily housing industry.

Journalists are typically generalists and cannot be expected to know preferred terminology for every topic, she noted. However, members of the [apartment](#) industry can assist in the mission to educate the public by using the correct terminology themselves and by offering training to the media.

Provided by Ball State University

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